

**“Who am I?”:
Immigrant Identity in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Jhumpa
Lahiri’s *the namesake***

Nina Koskinen
University of Tampere
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Pro gradu -tutkielmassani tutkin maahanmuuttajaidentiteettiä Bharati Mukherjeen romaanissa *Jasmine* (1989) sekä Jhumpa Lahirin romaanissa *the namesake* (suom. *Kaima*, 2003). Tutkin identiteettiä psykologian, sosiaalipsykologian sekä kulttuurintutkimuksen näkökulmista soveltaen käsitteitä kuten hybridinen identiteetti, monikulttuurinen identiteetti ja identiteetin suorittaminen. Tutkielmassani tutkin romaanien juonia yksityiskohtaisesti, luoden kuvan henkilöahmojen identiteettien muodostumisprosesseista ja niistä vaikeuksista, joita hahmot tahoillaan kohtaavat. Tutkin hybridistä identiteettiä maailmanlaajuisena ilmiönä, joka on kasvava tekijä ihmisten elämässä monikulttuurisessa yhteiskunnassa.

Bharati Mukherjeen *Jasmine* kertoo nuoresta naisesta, joka laittomasti emigroituu Intiasta Yhdysvaltoihin. Jasmine muuttaa useamman kerran identiteettiään muuttuvissa olosuhteissa omaksuen itsellensä aina uuden nimen. Jasmine on taistelija ja selviytyjä, mutta hänellä on suuria vaikeuksia elää uusien identiteettiensä kanssa. Hän kuvittelee, että hänen täytyy tuhota vanha identiteettinsä, jotta hän voi siirtyä seuraavaan. Päähenkilöllä on vaikeuksia ymmärtää hybridisen identiteetin muovautumiskykyä ja joustavuus.

Jhumpa Lahirin *the namesake* (suom. *Kaima*) puolestaan kertoo toisen sukupolven maahanmuuttajasta Gogol Gangulista. Gogolilla on vaikeuksia luoda identiteetti, joka ottaisi huomioon hänen sukujuurensa, mutta antaisi hänen silti olla amerikkalainen. Gogolin suurimmat vaikeudet kumpuavat hänen hämmennyksestään nimeään kohtaan. Hän ei ymmärrä nimensä merkitystä tai tarkoitusta, ja näin ollen päätyy vaihtamaan nimensä. Gogol päätyy kuitenkin katumaan päätöstään myöhemmin elämässään, kun hän vihdoinkin ymmärtää, mitä hänen isänsä oli Gogolin nimellä tarkoittanut. Hän tulee sinuiksi itsensä kanssa, kun hän ymmärtää hybridisen identiteetin muovautumiskyvyn sekä monimuotoisuuden.

Tutkimuksessani havaitsen kuinka hybridisen identiteetin luominen voi tuottaa vaikeuksia maahanmuuttajalle, mutta tästä huolimatta hybridinen identiteetti on samanaikaisesti välttämätön uusissa olosuhteissa selviämiseen. Hybridinen identiteetti antaa maahanmuuttajalle mahdollisuuden muokata omaa identiteettiään muuttuvien olosuhteiden mukaisesti, jotta elämä uudessa ympäristössä sujuisi mahdollisimman hyvin.

avainsanat: hybridinen identiteetti, monikulttuurinen identiteetti, identiteetin suorittaminen, maahanmuuttajaidentiteetti

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1. Introduction

Postcolonial literature frequently discusses the notion of immigrant experience, or the feelings and motives of action experienced by those integrating into a new country. Immigration and emigration are currently so common that an increasing number of people are concerned with the consequences. Today it might be very difficult to ask someone where they come from, or what nationality they are, as the person might not be able to answer. One might say that they were born in India, lived their childhood in England, went to college in the United States and is now living in Australia and has three different passports. Where can they say they are from then? In this case what matters the most is the identity that person has adopted; how has s/he been able to modify their identity in the process and how has the identity evolved? Who does s/he feel to be? This all depends on what kind of identity the person has created for themselves at each step of the journey.

Bharati Mukherjee is “an American citizen of Indian heritage,” (Dascălu 2007, 3) commonly described as a postcolonial author who frequently writes about the immigrant experience. She is a writer who can be “called a representative of the whole ‘immigrant literature’.” (Jha & Jha 2007, 1) *Jasmine* (1989) is one of her most popular novels (Dascălu 2007, 66) and it follows the life of a female immigrant who is also the narrator of the novel. *Jasmine* leaves India in “search of a new life and identity” (Dascălu 2007, 66) and the story follows her journey from a small rural village in India through big city life in New York to life in a small town in Iowa. At each step of her journey she creates a new identity for herself and is known by a different name.

Jhumpa Lahiri is also an American-Indian writer, but in contrast to Mukherjee, she is a second generation immigrant. She was born in London to Indian parents and has spent most

of her life in America (Kung 2009). In her first novel *the namesake* (2003) Lahiri presents a story of a boy born to an Indian family in the United States. The novel converses the difficulty of deciding on one's identity. A very clear and an important part of the novel is the main character Gogol Ganguli's struggle of finding his identity and deciding who he is, although other characters concerned with the problems of identity construction can be found in the novel as well. Gogol struggles with his name which results in him changing it, only for him to discover it does not change the person he ultimately is.

In literature, it is very important that the reader can identify with the characters in the stories. The reader is looking for characters who encounter similar experiences and therefore the reader is able to relate to the characters. I have personally found the novels studied very appealing and I have been able to identify with the immigrants' feelings and thoughts. I have moved abroad with my family several times when growing up. I have been faced with an entirely different culture and its people and have been forced to accommodate into the new surroundings. Years later, when reading these novels I found myself reliving my own experiences through the characters in the novels. This strong personal reading experience is the main reason that I have chosen to study these novels and their relation to identity formation. I chose these works of Indian English literature to represent the immigrant experience and identity formation, but as an experience the feelings are universal. Immigration is a global phenomenon and through literature we are able to study these personal experiences and feelings. These novels are widely studied through postcolonial theory and diasporic identity. In my study I want to show how widespread, general and worldwide these feelings are that the immigrants in the novels feel. In my opinion, it is time that the idea of hybrid identity be thought of as part of our everyday experience as people are increasingly in contact with others around the globe. It is decreasingly necessary for us to be

able to define nationality or background. Instead emphasis should be made on the importance of the individual experience and the success of the formation of our fluid hybrid identities. In this way we are able to avoid the distress of feeling out of place.

Both *Jasmine* and *the namesake* present a story of the immigrant experience, both in their own way, showing how the immigrant or immigrant family fight to survive in the diverse surroundings and what steps have to be taken for one to come to terms with themselves and their identity. In my thesis I will study these novels in terms of the immigrant identity, see how the identities are constructed and what the difficulties are that many immigrants face in terms of their identity and its hybridity. I will mainly focus on Jasmine's and Gogol's identities, their construction, their similarities and differences. I will also examine the multitude of issues that they face concerning their identities respectively, given that one is a first generation immigrant while the other a second generation immigrant. I will look at accommodation in terms of identity and study the role which identity formation plays in the accommodation process of an immigrant. In literary studies the term identity is commonly used very freely when a character is being studied. I wanted to look at identity more closely as a psychological term and study it in terms of different schools of thought. In my thesis I will discuss the issue of identity from the basis of Stuart Hall's and Homi Bhabha's notions on cultural identity as well as use the ideas of psychologists and psychoanalysts such as Erik H. Erikson, Harke Bosma, Tobi L. G. Graafsma and Harold D. Grotevant's on identity, not leaving out the views of postcolonial theorists, when studying the identities of the protagonists.

Another interesting idea is the idea of the connection between our identity and our name. Both of the protagonists find a need to create new names for themselves and their identities. It becomes clear that our name and our identity need to somehow correspond with

each other in order for use to be content with ourselves. The idea of the connection between our names and identities will be also studied within the thesis.

2. Identity

In the following sections I will study identity from the basis of different schools of thought and look at different views of identity. As identity is something that has been studied so widely, I will try to give an understanding of how I will be looking at the identities of the protagonists in the novels and what kind of definitions of identity I will use when studying the identities in the novels. I will begin by the basic definitions of identity from the basis of developmental psychology and move on to give an understanding of what is meant by cultural identity and its different forms.

2.1 Identity in Developmental Psychology

Identity has been greatly studied in the fields of psychology and social psychology and much of our knowledge on identity can be credited to E. H Erikson's studies on identity. Erikson focused widely on the idea of a developing identity throughout the growth of a child and much of his work focused on adolescent psychiatry. This is why many of today's developmental psychologists base their work on Erikson's writings. (Graafsma, 1994, 21-22) According to Tobi L.G Graafsma, a psychologist and a psychoanalyst, many developmental psychologists consider identity to be something achievable and something that becomes complete when one reaches maturity at the end of adolescence. (1994, 41) This means that identity formation has a "finish line" or an ending at some point and the only time for identity

formation would be at adolescence before adulthood or at different crises in one's life. In contrast to this view, Graafsma goes on to state that he believes identity to be an "encompassing phenomenon" by which he means "the tendency of the individual ego to perceive or to deny identity between wishes, feeling states, and reality." (1994, 41) What this means is that according to Graafsma identity is an issue that a person is faced with throughout his/her life and that different life events shape our identity. Graafsma's definition of identity gives room for immigrant identity formation which has to undergo changes as the surroundings transform. Even though Erikson studies identity greatly in terms of childhood, adolescence and crises, many of Erikson views on identity are very important as I will be looking at identity as an everlasting process. According to Erikson the term identity refers to "something noisily demonstrative, to a more or less desperate 'quest', or to an almost deliberately confused 'search'." (1968, 19) Erikson also notes that in adolescence we "pass through the crises of identity" and we mature mentally. He also states that the stage of adolescence cannot be passed without the crises of identity and identity finding its form, which will then determine our later life. (1968, 91) The idea of our identity formation being a "quest" or "search" is something that I find especially noteworthy. In terms of the immigrant identity this idea of identity finding its form and our life being a constant search and a quest is very apt. In my view, the immigrant is faced with the "search" for identity not only in the important steps from childhood to adulthood, but at each step of their journey in life as the environment in which one lives changes.

According to Graafsma and Bosma (1994, 176) identity is, psychologically speaking, generally "individual's unique combination of personal, generally inalienable data, like name, sex and profession, by which that individual is characterized and distinguishable from any other person" but it also "refers to a person's unique personality structure and it is also used to

refer to the images others have of that personality structure.” In other words, identity is essentially constructed of our basic information which is also known to the people around us, but includes vital features of our personality as well. Identity cannot therefore be said to consist of only one thing, but as Graafsma and Bosma note above, identity is “individual’s unique combination of... data.” Therefore it is very difficult to say what things specifically make a person’s identity. In my opinion, it is very interesting to think about the things that are vital to our identity. In the discussion of the novels we will see how a person’s identity is essentially connected to one’s name. It seems to be virtually impossible to have an identity not connected to a name and what an impact our given name has on our changing identity. Graafsma and Bosma continue stating that issues such as the sense of identity and identity awareness are also crucial when discussing the notion of identity. (1994, 176) These will be discussed in the following section.

Psychology as a field gives us important definitions on what is meant by identity as a term and this is in my view very important to note when studying identity, even when studying literary characters. Developmental psychology offers us ways to look at the identities of the protagonists, but in my view the identities cannot be studied merely in terms of psychological growth and crises. The immigrant identity changes, develops, absorbs and rejects as the subject continues their life’s journey. Social psychology and cultural theory in this way give us more insight into the immigrant identity, and help us understand the identities of the protagonists in the novels. The next section will give us more insight into cultural identity.

2.2 Cultural Identity

Identity has become an important theme in the fields of social psychology and sociology as well. In this section I will study identity from the basis of Stuart Hall's and D. Petkova's studies on cultural identity as well as look at a study made by Hong (2000) and her colleagues on bicultural and multicultural identity. I will also look at what is meant by identity performance and the sense of identity as well as hybrid identity.

As Stuart Hall (1996, 2) states, identity and identification can be seen as "a process never completed," thus always changing. It cannot therefore be accomplished, achieved, or gained but neither can it be "lost" or "abandoned." (Hall 1994, 2) This idea of an always incomplete identity is something that was also noted by Graafsma earlier on. The idea of an identity that constantly changes is very common to cultural theory, as the identity can be seen absorbing from the cultures around it. Hall goes on to describe cultural identities as "never unified," but "fragmented and fractured ... and are constantly in the process of change and transformation." (1996, 4) This is the main idea behind identity from the cultural perspective and this "fragmented and fractured" identity is exactly what I will argue can be found with the immigrant identities in the novels studied.

What I believe to be a significant aspect when studying immigrant identity from the cultural perspective is the idea of identity in relation to the other. According to Stuart Hall, cultural identities can be "more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of identical, naturally constructed unity." (Hall 1996, 4) The "naturally constructed unity" is in Hall's view the traditional definition of identity, and is thus important to distinguish from what is meant by more modern notions of cultural identity. In other words, cultural identities are created in heterogeneous surroundings, where the cultural identity

transforms and develops. Cultural identity is also always connected to the time and place, and is thus very open to change. Hall again has demonstrated this very evidently in his writing:

Identities are questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we come from', so much as what we might become. (1996, 4)

This illustrates the idea of identity being always connected to culture and always being in motion. Identities develop and evolve according to one's surroundings and in this way we adapt to our changing environment. Hall continues on with this idea of identity being related to the other and states that "it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not... that... identity can be constructed." (1996, 4–5) In other words we can say that traditionally identity can be said to have become somewhat consistent when one reached adulthood. This happened when the surroundings were more homogeneous; people were born and raised in the same areas where they themselves started their families, they had more constant and permanent jobs, and they spoke the same language as their great-grandparents. Today, in the more modern and diverse surroundings, this kind of a situation is very rare. Cultural identities are something that each and every one of us today possess, as we are in contact with other countries, language, ways and values. Cultural identity in this way is not only something that concerns immigrants, but can be seen as the new definition of identity in the modern world. Today culture cannot be taken away from identity.

Holland et al. note that newer studies on identity, such as Stuart Hall's (1996), differ greatly from the more dated studies of Erik Erikson (1963, 1968). As well as Graafsma, Holland et al. state that identity is not considered something achievable or something that can be seen to become "consistent" at maturation. Rather identity is influenced by "social forces which make such integrated subject an extremely unlikely occurrence." (2001, 7) According

to Petkova, “every individual has a strong need for cultural identity” and “this is why quite unconsciously individuals look for arguments to sustain their cultural identity.” (2005, 18) Petkova concludes that “identity is not a stable and finished product, but it evolves, transforms and undergoes crises.” (2005, 18) In this way, Petkova continues, the cultural identity is always tied to a time and a place and a specific social context. Therefore cultural identity can be seen as a “construct of a given historical epoch.” (2005, 18) This confirms the idea of cultural identities being firmly tied to a time and place.

The idea of a fluid cultural identity, that the theorists above have introduced, is very important when studying immigrant identity and the identities of the protagonists in the novels. This is in my view how the protagonists’ identities can be seen evolving in the course of the novels, as they clearly mirror their own identities in relation to the people around them. Their inherent difference in contrast to their environment is the source of their evolving cultural identities. Therefore I will argue that this kind of evolving and unstable identity can be clearly seen with the protagonist in the novel *Jasmine*, but can be also found with Gogol, in *the namesake* as well.

2.2.1 Bicultural/ Multicultural Identity

Cultural identity is something that every human being possesses, as each and every one of us is a part of a distinct culture and our identities reflect the culture in which we live. Bicultural or multicultural identity refers to people who live in or are a part of two or more different cultures. Hong and her colleagues have studied bicultural identity in individuals and they describe bicultural individuals in the following way:

Bicultural individuals are typically described as people who have internalized two cultures to the extent that both cultures are alive inside them. Many

bicultural individuals report that the two internalized cultures take turns in guiding their thoughts and feelings. (2000, 710)

The intriguing idea from this is the fact that the bicultural individuals themselves have reported having two different cultures that direct their thoughts and actions and they can act according to either culture. At this point it is interesting to ponder whether these people have one bicultural identity with two different cultures living inside it or whether actually their bicultural identity consists of two different cultural identities. This in my view is open to interpretation but I personally feel that the two cultures would construct an identity of their own, so that the person in fact has two different cultural identities.

Hong continues with the idea of bicultural individuals stating that their “internalized cultures are not necessarily blended” into one and that if a person takes on a new culture it does not always mean that the old culture is substituted. (200, 710) In their studies Hong et al. discovered that multi/bicultural individuals use something they call “frame switching” in which the individual performs according to the culture which s/he is exposed to. They call this “the dynamic constructivist approach” and state that in the light of this approach acculturation can be viewed “as a more active process.” (200, 718)

They continue:

People desiring to acculturate quickly surround themselves with symbols and situations that prime the meaning system of the host culture. Conversely, expatriates desiring to maintain the accessibility of constructs from their home culture surround themselves with stimuli priming that culture. (2000, 718)

What this means is that a bi-/multicultural individual can actively and consciously decide the way in which they act in a given situation. In other words, in different cultural surroundings they act according to that culture and its norms. This “frame switching”, as Hong et al. call it, is not always conscious, but can happen when a person is influenced by certain “cues” or signals of a given culture. (Hong et al. 2000, 718) This idea of a person’s cultural identity

being something that s/he can actively influence is very fascinating. This is something that can be studied within the characters of the novels as well and I will argue that it can most clearly be seen in the second generation immigrant Gogol as he is actively “frame switching” between his American identity outside his home and his Indian identity with his family. I will argue that this can also be seen in Jasmine’s active attempt at avoiding anything that reminds her of her past.

The idea behind “frame switching” is something that other theorists have also noted. The term “alternating biculturals” is sometimes used to refer to people who alternate or interchange between their two different cultural identities according to a given situation. (Wiley and Deaux 2011) On the one hand, according to Shaun Wiley and Kay Deaux alternating biculturals have “the strongest situational contingencies” meaning that they act according to one culture in distinct social settings. “Blended biculturals”, on the other hand, have two or more cultural identities that are blended or coinciding with each other. (Wiley and Deaux 2011, 50) Blended biculturals have been able to join together the two cultures and create an identity which displays both of the cultures. Blended biculturals in my view do not actively change the way they act in a given situation, but are able to modify their identity when need be. According to Wiley and Deaux, alternating biculturals perform their identity and must consciously decide how to act in a given situation. They have to “choose which identity to display and/or when to display both simultaneously.” (2011, 57) In my opinion this idea of alternating biculturals goes hand-in-hand with Hong et al.’s idea of “frame switching”, only they use different terms to describe the event of a person acting according to a given situation. The differentiation between alternating and blended biculturals is an important one, as I will argue that these two different forms of identity performance can be seen within the different characters in the novels.

In the next section I will look at what is meant by the sense of identity and identity performance. I will look at what is meant by someone performing their identity and why it is important when studying immigrant identity.

2.2.2 Identity Performance

Identity performance is something that each and every one of us executes daily. Identity performance is how we represent ourselves in different situations and how we choose to perform. We are encountered by multiple situations daily in which we need to choose how to act and what parts of our personality and identity to apply. (Wiley & Deaux 2011, 51) Klein, Spear & Reicher have studied identity performance and define it as “purposeful expression (or suppression) of behaviors relevant to those norms conventionally associated with a salient social identity.” (2007, 30) This “purposeful expression” is further emphasized in bicultural identity performance. Wiley and Deaux have studied bicultural identity performance:

[Bicultural individuals] are not simply passive reactors to cultural cues; rather, they exert agency in their identity presentation in response to their categorization and treatment by others, behaving in ways designed to elicit recognition or confirmation of their important identities. (2011, 51)

In other words identity performance is strongly connected to the idea of an “audience” as the presentation of an identity changes according to the people taking part in that particular situation. (Wiley & Deaux 2011, 57)

An immigrant has to create or choose a new identity suitable for a changing cultural situation and then act according to that identity and situation. Through identity performance, I believe, the immigrant’s cultural identity is created and transformed. Judith Butler has

discussed the notion of identity performance in her essay *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, in which she discusses the notion of performing gender. Butler states that

To say that I “play” at being one [lesbian] is not to say that I am not “really”; rather, how and where I play at being one is the way in which that “being” gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed. This is not a performance from which I can take radical distance, for this is deep-seated play, physically entrenched play, *and this “I” does not play its lesbianism as a role*. Rather, it is through the repeated play of this sexuality that the “I” is insistently reconstructed as a lesbian “I”; paradoxically, it is precisely the *repetition* of that play that establishes as well the *instability* of the very category it that it constitutes. (1993, 307)

This example from Judith Butler shows an important idea of identity performance. Identity is repeated through identity performance and as a result of that repetition the identity becomes established. In her essay, Butler also discusses the idea of us never quite being able to repeat our identities in an exactly the same way and consequently our identities change through that repetition.

As our cultural identities develop and change in the course of our lives, it is our own sense of identity that changes as well. What is meant by the idea of the sense of identity is “the subjective experience of such sameness, both within one’s own body and mind and within an average expectable, recognizing and sharing environment where one feels in place.” (Graafsma 1994, 23) Consequently the sense of identity is the personal experience of identity which is in connection to the time and place. The sense of identity does not have to always agree with the reality. (Graafsma 1994, 23) The sense of identity is how one is known to one’s self, or as according to Rangell, how one “thinks and feels” about one’s self. (1994, 28) As Graafsma points out, our sense of identity does not always correspond with how our identities are perceived by others. This is something that is clearly visible in the novels studied as well. I will use the term “sense of identity” when studying the novels to refer to the

characters' own perception of their identity. I will argue that the protagonist Jasmine has a strong sense of identity and is very readily changing it, as she knows what she doesn't want to become. Simultaneously knowing that in order for her life to be able to continue change is inevitable. For Gogol on the other hand, his sense of identity is undecided and unclear as he is very confused with who he is and who he is supposed to be. His sense of identity seems to also differ from the reality as in his adolescence he has a difficult time understanding who he is and discovering his identity, while the people around him do not find him strange or different. The sense of identity is also strongly connected to identity performance.

In the next section I will introduce the term hybrid identity. I will be looking at what is meant by the term and how it differs from the notions of identity that have been already discussed. I will also discuss its significance in terms of the novels studied.

2.2.3 Hybrid Identity

As identities are constantly evolving and are strongly connected to the time and place they create problems for immigrants settling to a new country. Cultural theorists use a different term to describe the fluid, ever-changing cultural identity that was discussed in earlier sections. They call it the hybrid identity. According to John McLeod, it is common for immigrants and their children to experience a feeling of "living in between different nations." (2000, 214) He goes on to describe this "in between [as] feeling neither here nor there, unable to indulge in sentiments of belonging to either place." (2000, 214) What this means is that the person does not see him/herself as belonging to either country. The new country can feel unfamiliar and foreign in the beginning, but as the immigrant settles into the new country the old country can also begin feeling alien. This sense of living in between two worlds "can be

painful, perilous and marginalizing” for the migrants and may cause them to have feelings of “displacement, fragmentation and discontinuity.” (McLeod 2000, 216) According to McLeod the idea of home is very important to us and it can provide us with a powerful “sense of... place in the world.” (2000, 210) As a word and an idea ‘home’ “stands for shelter, stability, security and comfort” (McLeod 2000, 210) but as McLeod states for immigrants living away from their motherlands this promise may often be broken by “actual experiences of home” in the new country. (2000, 210) McLeod continues that home often becomes imagined for an immigrant and “primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past. It exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present.” (2000, 211) Even though the immigrant experiences “displacement, fragmentation and discontinuity” it is important to note that not all these experiences can be thought of as only negative. It is true that unable to define home can be painful for an immigrant, but it can also be source of great opportunities. (McLeod 2000, 215) The immigrant can make the best of the situation even if at first feeling out of place and disconnected. In my opinion, if the immigrant is able to transform their identity into a fluid hybrid one, it is also possible for them to experience hybridity as positive. In other words, not being firmly rooted in one place can also be experienced as a life full of prospect and potential. This feeling of limitless possibilities that life can bring, I will argue, is strongly seen in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*.

Homi Bhabha studies culture and hybridity much in his work. He describes the notion of hybridity in the following way:

In my own work I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the “authoritative”, even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be

equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an “interstitial” agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole. (1996, 58)

Homi Bhabha’s view of hybridity consists of much more than merely the aspects of hybridity regarding identity. Bhabha’s view includes an idea of the agency of the immigrant and how hybridity can be understood in terms of the individual as a whole and the immigrant as a part of a community. Homi Bhabha also states that cultures are never unified or whole nor can they be thought of as merely “dualistic in the relation of Self to Other” (1994, 52). Bhabha refers to the “in-between” as a state that signifies the immigrant experience. Bhabha describes the “in-between” as “neither one nor the other”, “the colonial signifier... literally splitting the difference between the binary oppositions or polarities through which we think cultural difference.” (1994, 180–182) Another very important idea that Bhabha represents is that “the time for ‘assimilating’ minorities to holistic and organic notions of cultural value has dramatically passed” (1994, 251) and that we need to move “towards the encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture’s difference.” (1994, 321)

The “in-between” feeling that the immigrant is faced with is something that Lois Tyson (2006) also describes in her work. Tyson refers to the feelings of displacement and fragmentation as part of postcolonial identity and something that a colonized subject feels. She refers to Homi Bhabha’s notion of *unhomeliness* as “this feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than to both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo which results... from the trauma of the cultural displacement within

which one lives...” (2006, 421) These feelings experienced by the immigrant coincide with how MacLeod stated the immigrant can feel. In my opinion these feelings of unhomeliness and being “in-between” are exactly what the immigrant as well as the colonized subject can feel. It is important to note that in today’s world immigration is experienced by a very varied group of people from very different backgrounds. In my view these feelings are commonly only talked about in terms of colonialism, but in today’s world they affect a growing number of people. This is why in this paper, I want to emphasize the universality of the immigrant experience, even though we are looking at a postcolonial context.

The feeling of “in-between” or “unhomeliness” creates the need for the immigrant to create a new sense of identity through hybridization and this new identity can be called the hybrid identity. What is meant by hybridization is that of the immigrant joining together or forming her identity on the basis of the cultures that she feels that she lives in-between of. McLeod states this hybrid identity to be “composed from variable sources, different materials, many locations...” (2000, 219) He continues to say that “hybrid identities are never complete in themselves... they remain perpetually in motion... open to change and reinscription.” (2000, 219) Through creating this hybrid identity the immigrant is able to join together the many different parts of her life to compose an identity suitable for living and managing in the new country and a new situation. As McLeod already stated, this hybrid identity is never stable and as the immigrant’s journey continues, the identity keeps changing. Hybridization and hybrid identity can be viewed as a way for the immigrant to adapt and accommodate into the new country and its culture, and to be able to create a very personal and an individual notion of the self and what it means to be, for example, an Indian woman living in America. Therefore hybridization gives the immigrant the power and room to establish herself as an individual in a new country and join together parts of her past culture and traditions to those

of the new country. It does not force the immigrant to entirely abandon her past but simultaneously forces her to be able to continuously recreate and reform her identity. As MacLeod states “the concept of hybridity has proved very important for diaspora peoples... as a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial and national purity.” (2000, 219)

In my own view hybrid identity is something that in today’s world cannot be said to exist only in diaspora peoples, but is becoming increasingly important in everyday life. It is becoming a more general experience. It is very common for people in today’s world to live around the world during their lifetime therefore the need for a fluid identity is very evident. People have international connections through work, school and social life, not to mention the effect that social media has on bringing the world closer together. We are unable to separate different cultures or people from each other and it is becoming inconsequential. Most people in today’s world are faced with questions of cultural identity every single day and have the need to possess a fluid identity and be able to adapt to a changing situation, country and its norms.

The term hybrid identity in my view has a very similar meaning to idea of the identity performance of blended biculturals. In my opinion, blended biculturals have a hybrid identity and this is something that can be seen in the characters studied as well.

In following sections I will be analyzing the novels and applying the different forms of identities introduced above to the protagonists and other characters as well. I will distinguish what kind of struggles the immigrants face in their identity formation and try to give an understanding of their fluid hybrid identities.

3. Identities in the Novels

The novels, *Jasmine* and *the namesake*, both depict a story of a person struggling with his/her identity. At first it might seem that the stories are very similar in showing the struggles of adapting to America and learning the ways of life, but a closer examination of the characters reveal that the identities and the problems with identities that the protagonists have are fairly different.

In Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, we can see mainly only one character whose identity can be studied from the immigrant perspective. Jasmine immigrates to America by herself and the novel shows her solitary journey in America. Then again, *the namesake* begins as a story of a married couple settling to America. In the course of the novel, the novel concentrates on examining and showing the difficulties the children of immigrants face in America. In *the namesake* it is not only one person settling to a new country, but an entire family who faces the problems of identity.

In the following sections, I will be revealing the construction of the main characters' identities. This is possible through detailed description and analysis of the plot and how the different events in the characters' lives influence their identities and the problems they face. Ever since the Antiquity, the plot has been an important tool in uncovering the ways of people, as according to Aristotle "literature is an imitation of life." (Rapaport 2011, 173) According to Aristotle "everything that is part of the organism is required because of the function it serves relative to the system as a whole." (Rapaport 2011, 170) This idea of a biological organism being similar to literature is something that can be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle's view was that "both are total forms whose parts exist by way of necessity in order to establish a system in which each part serves the needs of the other parts in some

way.” (Rapaport 2011, 171) In other words, the literary work creates something as a whole and in this way each part of the story is necessary for the construction of the whole. This is the main reason for the detailed plot analysis. In my opinion, many of the smaller parts, events, and actions serve important elements in the story as a whole. Aristotle also thought that “total form meant that a literary work should have a definite beginning, middle and end.” (Rapaport 2011, 171) This kind of fixed plot is not evident in stories that represent characters that possess open-ended, ever-changing hybrid identities. The plot structure itself is not linear with a beginning and an end, but mirrors the complexity of the characters represented. In my analysis I will explain the plots of the stories chronologically to be able to present the growth of the identities of the characters, but the novels themselves are not constructed in this linear manner.

In the following sections, sections 3.1 and 3.2, I will explain how the identities are formed and what kind of problems the characters face in terms of their immigrant hybrid identities. The uncovering of the plot is an important method in my study and only by going through the entire plot, can the stories of the characters be unraveled. Because the novels clearly follow a structure in which the reader is introduced into the life and growth of the characters, it is essential to uncover the plot of the novel as thoroughly as possible. Through the plot the reader is shown the growth of the characters and their changing identities. In my opinion, it is essential for me to show how the characters think and feel in order to be able to analyze their identities.

3.1 Analysis of Immigrant Identity in *Jasmine*

The novel *Jasmine* (1989) written by Bharati Mukherjee depicts an immigrant's journey. With that journey, the reader is shown the struggles that the immigrant is faced with having to adapt to an ever changing situation. As Jasmine moves from one place to another, she needs to constantly recreate herself. She is aware of the fact that it is necessary for her to change: "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we are so we can rebirth ourselves..." (Jasmine, 29) This quote shows how violently Jasmine's character is ready to recreate herself. She thinks that she needs to be rid of her old identity in order to adapt and become something new. Until the very end of the novel, she feels that it is necessary for her to "murder" herself and her old identity in order to become someone else. She does not realize that in order for her to be able to live her life, she needs to be able to create an evolving identity that is unstable and which she has to constantly alter in the changing environment. Because Jasmine is always given a new name, the shifts in her identity are very concrete and clear to the reader. Jasmine creates an identity around her new name, and it seems to be through the name change that Jasmine can change her identity as well. She is also very aware of all her different identities, and by the end of the novel her hybrid identity consists of many different versions of herself. It is clear that the formation of her identity is never fully complete. As was mentioned earlier, according to the idea of cultural theory and social psychology, a cultural identity is not supposed to become stable or finished in any way, as identity is always concerned with the time and place and is supposed to continue evolving.

In the following sections I will demonstrate how Jasmine's immigrant identity forms and evolves in the course of the novel. For the sake of clarity, I will be uncovering Jasmine's journey in three parts: Jyoti/Jasmine, Jazzy/Jase and Jane respectively. These three parts

depict Jasmine's journey in a chronological order simultaneously showing how her name changes at each step. When talking about the protagonist, I will be referring to her as Jasmine throughout.

3.1.1 Jasmine's Identity Formation: Jyoti/Jasmine

Jasmine's identity develops very noticeably in the course of the novel. Her shifts in identity are made very clear to the reader as she does not only change who she is, but at each step of her journey she is given a new name. Even Jasmine is not the name that she was born with. Jasmine's story begins in a small town of Hasnapur in India, where she is born and given the name Jyoti. As a teenager, she is married to Prakash Vijh and moves from her small village to a large urban city in India. This is where her transformation begins:

He wanted to break down the Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past he gave me a new name: Jasmine.
(Jasmine, 77)

The new name Jasmine represents a new idea of herself. She is no longer the small humble village girl, but is forced into a new role of a modern city woman. Even at this very early point in the story, we are introduced to a character who in her own words "shuttled between identities." (Jasmine 77) Prakash is an ambitious, strong willed engineer who dreams of moving to America with Jasmine: "I want for us to go away and have a real life. I've had it up to here with backward, corrupt, mediocre fools." (Jasmine, 81) Prakash is accepted into Florida International Institute of Technology and their vision for better life in America is starting to become real. He wants them to be able to achieve something better than what their lives can offer in India. But just before they set for America, Jasmine is tragically widowed.

Despite the death of her husband, Jasmine wants to fulfill her husband's dreams and leaves India for America.

Jasmine is very young when she gets married and as an adolescent, she has not yet been able to determine who she is when she is already made to become something completely different. Jasmine is willing to change into a modern city woman as per her husband's wishes as that is what she thinks is needed from her to be able to start their new and improved life in America. This step from Jyoti to Jasmine can be seen as her first step away from the idea of an Indian wife and into a more international Western woman. Even though at this point they are still living in India, Jasmine is already experiencing something that can be analyzed as frame switching as she "shuttle[s] between identities" (*Jasmine*, 77) and needs to consciously act according to an identity.

In the following section I will be studying Jasmine's next step in her journey: her eventful transformation into Jazzy and later to Jase.

3.1.2 Jasmine's Identity Formation: Jazzy/Jase

Jasmine's first days and weeks in America are not easy. As an illegal immigrant she has to fight to survive on her own and has to try to quickly adapt to her new life. When first arriving to America she is raped by "Half-Face", a man who helped the illegal immigrants into America. She ends up killing her rapist, violently transforming away from her former self in order to survive. This part of the story shows very brutal violence which is not seen so evidently in other parts of the story. Mukherjee has created this dramatic beginning to Jasmine's life in America to portray how the illegal immigrant has to give up everything she has. She felt as if her "body was merely the shell" (*Jasmine*, 121) and there was nothing left

of her former self. This tragic beginning also reveals “the fighter and adapter” which the reader will soon after become acquainted with. Despite the fact that this part is very striking and shocking to the reader, Mukherjee has introduced it as merely one tragic event in Jasmine’s life. The rape and murder are events that shape Jasmine’s identity and enforce the idea of Jasmine as a fighter. Before the rape Jasmine had thought about committing sati, the act of a Hindu widow of immolating herself on her husband’s funeral pile (OED online, s.v. *suttee* n.), while burning her husband’s suit.

I had not given even a day’s survival in America a single thought. This was the place where I had chosen to die, on the first day if possible... Under the... tree I had dreamed of arranging the suit and twigs. The vision of lying serenely on a bed of fire under palm trees in my white sari had motivated all the weeks of sleepless, half-starved passage... (*Jasmine*, 120-121)

When arriving to America Jasmine had been an Indian widow on a mission. Her mission was to commit sati while burning her husband’s suit and in this way not having to live the shameful life of a widow consistent with the old traditions in India. Her aim was to be able to join her husband in spirit and not having to live the life of a widow. After the rape Jasmine “felt a sudden sense of mission.” (*Jasmine*, 117) She felt that there was a reason she has survived and was then willing to continue on as a fighter. The morality of the murder is not under question at any point in the novel, nor is it much discussed later on, it is merely portrayed as an event which occurred and can be viewed as an inescapable turning point in Jasmine’s life. After murdering her rapist she decides not to burn herself. She burns her husband’s suit and all her belongings and “began (her) journey, traveling light.” (*Jasmine*, 121)

A kind American woman, Lillian Gordon, helps Jasmine get settled in America and her transformation away from Jyoti continues as Lillian begins calling her Jazzy. Jasmine’s

journey is very eventful and it is clear how she openly changes her identity and appearance according to the situation. Lillian Gordon guides Jasmine in her attempt to appear like an American woman. Jasmine begins to adopt the ways of American life and culture in order to survive.

Walk American, she exhorted me, and she showed me how. I worked hard on the walk and deportment. Within a week she said I lost my shy sidle... I checked myself in the mirror, shocked with the transformation. Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords and running shoes. (Jasmine, 133)

It is essential for Jasmine to look American so that no one would be able to tell that she is an illegal immigrant. She has to noticeably and radically change her appearance from the shy Indian girl. “Now remember if you walk and talk American they’ll think you were born here. Most Americans can’t imagine anything else.” (Jasmine, 134–135) These examples from the novel show how in this case the immigrant is forced to change herself very drastically to be able to begin her new life. She is no longer Jasmine from India, but “Jazzy in a t-shirt... and running shoes.” She does not only have a new appearance, but has an entirely different identity. Again it is evident how Jasmine’s new identity is created for her. Her new name, Jazzy, is given to her by Lilian and Jasmine only has to follow along. She assumes an identity that someone else asserts on her and does not object, as it is the only things that she can do in order to survive.

Jasmine’s journey continues in America very optimistically, even though her first days in the new country were tragic. She seems to gain everything she needs in order to start her new life. She is quickly employed as a caretaker for an American family and continues developing her new American identity. As being a caretaker she goes by the name Jasmine, but Taylor, the husband of the family, starts quickly calling her Jase. Jasmine begins falling in love with Taylor and the idea of herself as Jase.

The love I felt for Taylor that first day had nothing to do with sex. I fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. I wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful. (*Jasmine*, 171)

Jasmine begins falling in love with the idea of herself as Jase, a courageous American woman who is capable of anything. She begins seeing herself as worth something and begins enjoying her new life. Jasmine seems to be very happy with her new identity: “For every Jasmine the reliable caregiver there is a Jase, the prowling adventurer. I thrilled to the tug of opposing forces.” (*Jasmine*, 177) She sees her life as an adventure where anything is possible. She enjoys the woman that she has become, or in fact the woman Taylor has made her into: “I liked everything he said or did. I liked the name he gave me: Jase. Jase was a woman who bought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants.” (*Jasmine*, 176) By changing herself rapidly to fit the image of an American woman she starts “getting rooted.” (*Jasmine* 179) For a while it seems as if there was no trace of the old Jyoti or even the old Jasmine left in her, and she has been able to “rebirth” herself. After Taylor’s wife, Wylie, decides to leave him for another man, it seems as if Jasmine has found her place. At this point we can see how Jasmine has been able to modify and alter her identity very drastically in a very short time. She feels the need to be as American as possible and at this point she feels that she can replace her old identity with a new one. She wants to forget the old Jyoti even existed as it seems to be easier for her that way. It seems to be very easy for her to step into this ready-made identity who seems to be liked. At this point her identity formation seems very successful but if examined closely what can be seen is an immigrant fiercely replacing her former identity and ignoring and abandoning her prior life in order to be content with her life. In a way it is possible to interpret Jasmine’s attempts in “murdering” her former identity as an attempt to forget her

past and everything about her that reminds her of India. Her past is too painful with all the suffering and death that she has had to encounter that she feels she will find happiness by ignoring everything and anything that reminds her of the past. This is a point in which we can see Jasmine's bicultural identity emerging. She is actively avoiding the cues that remind her of the past in order to adapt quickly.

In the following section I will be looking at the next step in Jasmine's identity formation: becoming Jane Ripplemeyer.

3.1.3 Jasmine's Identity Formation: Jane

After accidentally seeing a ghost from the past, the killer of her husband in India, Jasmine feels the need to escape. She feels that she is not safe in New York and leaves for Iowa. In Iowa she meets an American banker called Bud, who she promises one day to marry. She becomes pregnant to Bud and seems to be living the American life. She feels that Bud is in love with the American part of her, and does not need to know who she used to be. Jasmine is abandoning her own cultural background and traditions and replacing them with American ways and values. This can be seen in their daily life as Jasmine strives to be a very normal American wife to Bud and does not bring about her colorful past in any way. In Iowa Jane becomes Jane Ripplemeyer.

Bud calls me Jane. Me Bud, you Jane. I didn't get it at first. He kids. Calamity Jane. Jane as in Jane Russell, not Jane as in Plain Jane. But Plain Jane is all I want to be. Plain Jane is a role, like any other. (Jasmine, 26)

Bud has given Jane a very normal and unexciting name, making her an American woman one step further. In a way Bud is afraid of Jasmine, as her "genuine foreignness frightens him"

(Jasmine, 26) and by calling her Jane, she becomes less frightening to him and she does not need to think about her Indian past. Dascălu says:

[T]he referencing of the staples of American popular culture -Tarzan and the movies actress Jane Russell and even the folksy reference to 'Plain Jane' – place the narrator's new name in a symbolic chain that links and binds her subjectivity into an American cultural matrix. (2007, 70)

She continues on stating that the “Anglicization” of her name “is an attempt to make the central character safe... and render her foreignness less dangerous.” (2007, 70) Jasmine does not protest against her new name, as she likes the fact that the name Jane makes her fit into the American society better and she willingly accepts a new identity for herself. She admits that “Jane is a role, like any other”. What can be deduced from this statement is that the construction of her identity as Jane is a role that she plays. She is not genuinely transformed into what she pretends to be, but she needs to actively and consciously play the role of Jane. Again, the identity with its name is not of her own creation. The name is given to her by someone else, in this case her husband. And the identity that is formed around Jane is something that is created through necessity of the surroundings. Jasmine needs to yet again actively avoid anything of her past as her appearance is already foreign enough in the small town.

Throughout the story Jasmine states that in Baden, Iowa, she is very foreign to the people around her and that “In Baden, I am Jane. Almost.” (Jasmine, 26) In Iowa, she is able to settle down again and even though Bud becomes crippled and almost dies, she stays by his side and takes care of him. She becomes pregnant with his child and she seems to be well Americanized.

The problem with Jasmine thinking that she can settle down and become something entirely different is that she does not seem to always consciously realize that all her former

identities still live within her. She does not realize that she is not able to or even supposed to murder them, and rather they are what her hybrid identity consists of. Even though her life seems to be on track she is very confused:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer... And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (Jasmine, 127)

Even though she has been able to create a new identity and change herself in every situation, she has not been able to join her identities together to form a more coherent identity. She “shuttle[s] between identities” (Jasmine, 77) not being able to persist with one. Her confusion and shuttling between identities is created from her belief that she always needs to be one person at a time. She has not yet realized that hybrid identity is a fluid one and she does not need to choose between one or the other.

Living with Bud for a number of years she has taken a very traditional role as a wife, and she seems to notice that her role is also that of a traditional Indian wife. This is what Kumar (2001, 117) has also noted. When at the end of the novel Taylor comes to ask Jasmine to leave with him, Kumar notes that “in deserting Bud and choosing Taylor, Jasmine does not exchange between men, but she changes her whole world.” (2001, 117) Throughout her journey Jasmine has been fascinated with the American culture and what it has to offer and has been very quick in abandoning her former selves. At the end the decision is not difficult for her: “I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness.” (Jasmine, 240) Jasmine is an adventurer and it is clear that her hybrid identity needs to constantly change and it can never stay still for too long. Here we see how truly her identity is a hybrid one as she states that: “It isn't guilt that I feel. It's relief. I realize

I've already stopped thinking of myself as Jane.” (Jasmine, 240) She realizes that she has already begun changing her identity into something different, away from Jane Ripplemeyer. It holds true in reference to Jasmine's hybrid identity what was stated by McLeod (2000, 216-219): her hybrid identity “remains perpetually in motion” and certainly there are feelings of “displacement, fragmentation and discontinuity” in the character of Jasmine.

Throughout her journey Jasmine's sense of identity has been strong. The confusion that she has encountered has been caused by her sense of identity not being in sync with reality. She has openly contemplated on her identities and has had a strong sense of who she needs to become but has not realized that she cannot change herself entirely or let others decide on her identity for her. She needs to alter and evolve her identity herself in order to change and adapt to a changing environment. In my opinion, one of the major reasons why Jasmine leaves Bud for Taylor is the fact that with Taylor Jasmine can be who she really is. Just before Jasmine left Taylor she had confessed to him all that she is. She had told him her entire story of marriage, widowhood, rape, murder. The fact that Taylor comes to Iowa to look for Jasmine is relieving for Jasmine as she has to no longer play a role. With Taylor I assume she can let her colorful past be a part of who she is and her fluid hybrid identity.

By the end of the novel Jasmine realizes that her identity will remain forever in motion and that it is not necessary for her to kill her former selves. She realizes that her identity will forever consist of all her former selves and it does not seem to be confusing for her anymore, instead she finds it thrilling. This shows how Jasmine has accepted her hybrid identity and has understood that the fact that her identity is fluid and fragmented is an opportunity instead of a weakness. This idea of hybrid identity presenting possibilities for an individual was above presented by McLeod.

By the end of the novel Jasmine does not know who she is becoming but realizes that she is no longer Jane. She recognizes that she does not need to become an entirely different person with a changing situation and that she does not need to abandon her former selves. She also understands that she herself needs to be the person in charge of her identity and not let other people control who she needs to become. She finally realizes that her cultural, hybrid identity is forever evolving and unstable.

In the following section I will be looking at Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *the namesake*. I will focus on the identity construction of the main character Gogol Ganguli and his family.

3.2 Analysis of Immigrant Identity in *the namesake*

Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel *the namesake* presents a story of an immigrant family, the Gangulis, settling to America. Lahiri's story shows not only the troubles adapting into a new country experienced by immigrants themselves, but she has created a compelling story about the entire immigrant family. In Lahiri's novel the focus is on the firstborn son of immigrant parents. The novel shows how the child struggles finding a balance between the country he was born in and the country of his parents. His parents live in a diasporic community which consists mainly of other Bengalis, while the life of the children outside their home is very typical American life.

In the next sections I will discuss the plot of the novel and reveal how Gogol's as well as his entire family's life affects his identity. I have divided the next section into three parts: Gogol's family, Gogol's childhood and adolescence and Gogol's adulthood. These will be discussed respectively. I will start by discussing Gogol's mother and the issues concerning her immigrant identity and from there on move to Gogol's childhood.

3.2.1 Gogol's Family

Jhumpa Lahiri's *the namesake* centers around Gogol Ganguli and his family. At the beginning of the novel his parents settle in America as his father is a doctoral candidate for electrical engineering at MIT. After Gogol is born they move to Boston as his father becomes a professor in a university. From the very beginning the novel presents a picture of immigrants struggling to settle to America. Gogol's mother, Ashima, finds it very difficult in the beginning to live in America and she is very homesick:

Before Gogol's birth, her days had followed no visible pattern. She would spend hours in the apartment, napping, sulking, rereading her same five Bengali novels on the bed. (*the namesake*, 35)

This quote shows how she is very hung up on her mother country. It is also frequently mentioned how she continues repeatedly reading the same Bengali magazines and letters from her family back home. It seems as if Ashima is unable to enjoy her life in America. Even though years go by, Ashima continues feeling out of place:

...being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy –a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that the previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. (*the namesake*, 49-50)

As Ashima is left in the restrictions of her house, taking care of her husband and children, she has very little social contact with neighbors or with any American people for that matter. This is what makes her feel even more secluded. She does not socialize with any other people than other Bengalis and that is mainly the reason why she feels so out of place. If compared with

Jasmine, Ashima feels very similar feelings of difference and exclusion, but Jasmine is actively taking part in the society and making herself involved with her surroundings. Jasmine is consciously evolving herself and her identity, recreating herself to a changing situation and this can be seen the reason why she is successful, to a large extent, in adapting to life in America. Ashima, in contrast, holds on tightly to her own ways of life and has a hard time understanding the American traditions. She is reluctant to change her customs and ways of life and fights hard to live her way despite being in a new country.

Both of Gogol's parents find it difficult to understand that their children have American passports and the fact that they were born on American soil makes them Americans. The parents hold on firmly to their Bengali lifestyle and expect their children to want to do the same. The parents are astounded when the children do not want to leave for holidays to India, or do not enjoy their parents Bengali parties and the company of their parents Bengali friends. The clash between the first and the second generation immigrants is visible throughout the novel; they both struggle in life but in very different ways. The second generation immigrants only know the country they live in and view it as their home. Their parents on the other hand are always loyal to their motherland and for them "home" is somewhere else. This is what makes life very difficult for the children of immigrants. Gogol and his sister feel and think of themselves as Americans but see their parents as foreigners. An example of Ashima and Ashoke's bicultural identities can be seen when the family leaves for a vacation in India and is greeted by relatives at the airport.

Ashima, now Monu, weeps with relief, and Ashoke, now Mithu, kisses his brothers on both cheeks, holds their heads in hands. Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they do not feel close to them as their parents do. Within minutes, before their eyes, Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road. "I'm

scared, Goggles,” Sonia whispers to her brother in English, seeking his hand and refusing to let go. (*the namesake*, 82)

From this quote we can clearly see how the parents, being first generation immigrants, have come home to India and directly assume their Indian identities. This is a good example of “frame switching” (Hong et al. 2007) which was introduced earlier on. As soon as the environment changes, the parents adopt different identities, identities that feel very foreign to Sonia and Gogol.

The life of the children compared to the life of their parents is very different. The children live very American lives, watch American cartoons, go to school and have American friends. They also eat American food and enjoy many foods that their parents refuse to consume. Even though Gogol’s parents hold on strongly to their Bengali ways and values, Ahima, Gogol’s mother, confesses that she has to give in with the children. She has accepted to prepare an American dinner for her children once a week.

In the supermarket they let Gogol and Sonia fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, not they, consume: individually wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs. For Gogol’s lunches they stand at the deli to buy cold cuts, and in the mornings Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. (*the namesake*, 65)

As years go by and the children grow up, the Ganguli’s start slowly absorbing some American customs. The children, being born in America, want to celebrate Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving just like their friends. The parents, even though always at first reluctant, give in to the wants of the children but are always sure to pass on as much of their own culture as well. In a way the children teach the parents the American ways and the parents teach the children the ways of their ancestors. A good example of this is when Ashoke, Gogol’s father, decides to purchase a barbeque. In the suburbs it seems to be an obligation to have a barbeque

on the porch. The barbeque itself seems like a very obvious sign of American life, but the Ganguli's use the barbeque for tandoori. The parents begin to "mix and match" the two cultures and in a way create a hybrid way of life for themselves.

Each step, each acquisition, no matter how small, involves deliberation, consultation with Bengali friends. Was there a difference between a plastic rake or a metal one? Which was preferable, a live Christmas tree or an artificial one? They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house. (*the namesake*, 64)

This quote shows how the family takes part in American celebrations and strives to appear as just another American family amongst their neighbors. For the parents, Ashoke and Ashima, all this effort does not come naturally. They do not always necessarily want to do as they are expected and are sometimes even reluctant to do so, but they do it for their children. As the children grow up the parents begin to slowly realize their children's nationality.

For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look for far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati. (*the namesake*, 64)

But even though they begin to give in to the American ways, they still hold dear many important and traditional Indian celebrations and strive to pass the information and importance to their children:

During Pujos... Gogol and Sonia are dragged off to a high school or a Knights of Columbus hall overtaken by Bengalis, where they are required to throw marigold petals at a cardboard effigy of a goddess and eat bland vegetarian food. It can't compare to Christmas... (*the namesake*, 64)

The parents do everything in their power to expose the children to as much Bengali culture as possible:

They make a point of driving into Cambridge with the children when the Apu trilogy plays at the Orson Welles, or when there is a Kathakali dance performance or sitar recital at Memorial Hall. When Gogol is in the third grade, they send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday... (*the namesake*, 65)

But despite all their efforts, their children are American and sometimes feel very foreign to Ashoke and Ashima:

... when Ashima and Ashoke close their eyes it never fails to unsettle them, that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them, in accents they are accustomed not to trust. (*the namesake*, 65)

These quotes from the novel show evidently how the lives of the first and the second generation immigrants differ. It is clear that for the parents the word “home” will always have a different connotation than to their children.

3.2.2 Gogol’s Childhood and Adolescence

Even though the children were born in America, their life does not come without identity concerns. For Gogol, it seems that his childhood and adolescence are a constant struggle in determining who he really is. For Gogol the main source of concern is his name. His name seems to be something that he cannot identify with. His name is not a traditional Indian or a Bengali name. It is not passed on in his family, nor is it an American name for that matter. He is named after his father’s favorite author Nikolai Gogol, as his work has become a symbol of life to Ashoke. Gogol’s parents are forced to choose his name in the hospital when Gogol is born, without being able to consult Gogol’s great grandmother. Traditionally they would let the great-grandmother choose the name for their son, and themselves only give the child a pet name. They are required to write a name to the birth certificate of their newborn son. They decide on the pet name Gogol, and think that the formal name can be decided upon later.

Later it feels wrong to Ashima and Ashoke to see their son's pet name officially written down on a prescription bottle for antibiotics and on other official papers: "Pet names aren't meant to be public this way," (*the namesake*, 36) but the matter is left at that, as they conclude that the grandmother's letter including the name suggestions must have been lost in the mail.

When Gogol begins kindergarten his parents insist that he should have a "good name", a formal name, to be used at school as Gogol could not possibly be called by his pet name at school. The parents have decided on Nikhil as his "good name" at school. Gogol's father thinks:

The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. Not only is it perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning "he who is entire, encompassing all", but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol." (*the namesake*, 56)

Gogol's parents are happy that they have finally found a perfect good name for their son and that on top of it all, the name is "relatively easy to pronounce." (*the namesake*, 56) Despite of all, Gogol refuses to go to kindergarten. He does not see why he has to have a different name at school, "[h]e is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him." (*the namesake*, 57) At school he does not respond to the name Nikhil and prefers to be called Gogol. Despite his parents' wishes his teacher agrees to call him Gogol.

And so Gogol's formal education begins. At the top of sheets of scratchy pale yellow paper he writes his pet name again and again... In the front covers of textbooks which he is taught to read he leaves his legacy, writing his name in number-two pencil below a series of others. In art class, his favorite hour of the week, he carves his name with paper clips into the bottoms of clay cups and bowls... Gogol G. he signs his work in the lower right hand corner... (*the namesake*, 60)

Gogol has difficulties in trying to be someone he is not. At age five, he has only ever been called Gogol and is very confused at having to have a new name and having to be someone

else. He does not know anyone else, apart from his parents and other Bengali people who have two different names and it puzzles him. Gogol as a name and as an identity feel safe. His entire identity has been built around his name, and changing his name would mean that he would have to become someone else.

As a child, his name does not bother him in any way. He does not mind that there are no other Gogols in his school or that he does not know any other Gogols. But when Gogol reaches his teens, he first realizes the uniqueness and oddity of his name. He begins to hate his name, he hates having to explain his name to people, having to sign it and he hates seeing it written down.

He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second. (*the namesake*, 76)

His name does not simply bother him as a matter which he cannot help, but it begins to physically agonize him, “like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced to permanently wear.” (*the namesake*, 76) His name does not correspond to his identity anymore and he does not identify with his name. He feels that he is and needs to be someone other than Gogol and that “Gogol sounds ludicrous to his ears, lacking dignity or gravity.” (*the namesake*, 76) As Gogol he cannot imagine asking girls out on a date as he feels that “he cannot say “Hi, It’s Gogol” under potentially romantic circumstances” (*the namesake*, 76). Gogol would want to be part of a group, he would want to feel as if he belongs somewhere, but for him his name does not offer that option. He has somehow led himself to believe that all his insecurities are caused by his strange name and it is a name that does not give him room to do the things he wants. Gogol has somehow presumed that by having another name, a cooler name, he would

have the room to become what he wants. Aparajita De has succeeded in explaining the difficulties Gogol faces with his name. De observes:

His name (Russian, Indian, American, and unusual) never lets him forget his double difference (his Otherness) from his American milieu, leading him to experience a perpetual sense of exclusion from unproblematic belonging to America. (13, 2010)

This example clearly explains the feelings Gogol's name provoke in him. According to De, Gogol is not able to forget his foreignness and his difference because of his name. This continuous feeling of "otherness", I argue, is one of the main reasons he is driven to change his name. His name does not have any literal meaning to him and this confuses him.

For Ashoke, conversely, Gogol's name has a special meaning. For him Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" is a story that changed his life. Ashoke feels "a special kinship with Gogol" (*the namesake*, 77), the author. In Ashoke's youth, during a tragic train ride in India, he was reading "The Overcoat" while the train derailed and crashed. It was only thanks to the fluttering pages of "The Overcoat" that the rescuers found Ashoke. Even before the accident, the overcoat was a story that Ashoke kept rereading:

In some ways the story made less sense each time he read it, the scenes he pictured so vividly, and absorbed so fully, growing more elusive and profound. Just as Akaky's ghost haunted the final pages, so did it haunt a place deep in Ashoke's soul, shedding light on all that was irrational, all that was inevitable about the world. (*the namesake*, 14)

For Ashoke the story of Akaky Akakyevitch arouses feelings of resemblance. Ashoke can somehow identify with Akaky's mixed emotions about his identity. Caesar (2007) has noted:

[P]erhaps one thing that Ashoke responds to in the story is the sense that both reality and identity are multiple, existing on many planes at the same time. Life is not a simple, rational, sequential experience. Ashoke gains some unarticulated knowledge from the story that enables him to be many people at once and accept the contradictions of his life.

In my view this could be what Ashoke is feeling about the story, but I feel that Ashoke does not realize this himself. He feels resemblance to Akaky and likes the story because he sees his own identity struggles in Akaky. We like the things that feel familiar to us, and in Akaky's story Ashoke somehow feels familiarity. Because of "The Overcoat" Ashoke is able to evolve his identity and is not seen struggling with it in the novel. Ashoke is able to create a bicultural identity for himself and is able to shuttle between his identities in his work life, at home, in India and in America. This is also what Caesar noted above about Ashoke being able to be "many people at once".

What is also interesting about "The Overcoat" and its impact on Ashoke and Gogol's lives is the similarity of Akaky's and Gogol's struggles. Because of his name, Gogol seems to be tied to the story even though he does not know it himself. The beginning of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" seems to coincide with the story of Gogol Ganguli:

Perhaps it may strike the reader as a rather strange and farfetched name, but I can assure him that it was not farfetched at all, that the circumstances were such that it was quite out of the question to give him any other name. ("The Overcoat", 216)

For Gogol as well, it was the circumstances exactly that gave him his "rather strange" and "farfetched" name. At the time Gogol had to be given his name, there did not seem to be any other possible name that could be given to Gogol, and Gogol seemed the perfect name for the new child, even though it was only meant as a pet name to begin with. When Gogol is a teenager he struggles greatly with his name. As was mentioned earlier, he does not see why his parents would have given him a Russian name and what it has to do with him, an American boy with an Indian heritage. Gogol's father fails to explain to Gogol the significance of his name, and it is only much later in his life that he realizes the value and significance of his name. This is something to be discussed later on in the thesis.

A turning point for Gogol seems to be when his father gives him a copy of Nikolai Gogol's *The Overcoat*. Gogol Ganguli does not bother reading the book, instead he “wedges the book on a high shelf between two volumes of the Hardy Boys” (*the namesake*, 78) and tries to ignore it. This is when Gogol realizes for the first time that his name is the last name of Nikolai Gogol. He has always thought that he has at least one other person in the world that shares his name, and that he was given the same name as an important person.

This writer he is named after – Gogol isn't his first name. His first name is Nikolai. Not only does Gogol Ganguli have a pet name turned good name, but a last name turned first name. And so it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or anywhere shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake. (*the namesake*, 78)

This example shows how his name becomes even more absurd to him. He does not feel he relates to anyone in the world and this only adds to his difficulty in identifying with his name. Not long after, right before Gogol begins college, he decides to legally change his name.

He has already tried using a different name at some situations and has felt that he can be someone else and do so much more with a different name. A good example of a situation when Gogol assumes a different name and with it a different identity, is when Gogol kissed a girl at a party. He did not want to tell the girl his embarrassing name and instead lived the night as Nikhil, the good name his parents tried to give him when he began school.

“I can't believe you kissed her, Gogol,” his friends exclaim as they drive home from the party. He shakes his head in a daze, astonished as they are, elation still welling inside him. “It wasn't me,” he nearly says. But he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had nothing to do with it. (*the namesake*, 96)

This example shows how thrilling it is for Gogol to become someone else. He has more confidence and he believes in himself when using a different name. This is what leads him into changing his name legally as well. The interesting aspect about Gogol changing his name

is the fact that he himself believes that “[n]o one takes me seriously” (*the namesake*, 100) and it is because of other people and their possible reactions to his name that he fears. In reality the only person who thinks Gogol’s name is embarrassing or strange is Gogol himself. He has never been made fun of his name nor have any of his friends not taken him seriously.

As Nikhil he starts living a completely different life during his time in college. Nikhil has confidence and arrogance. He does things that he has only dreamed of before and feels free. With the new name he has finally gained a short American nickname that he has longed for ever since he was a child. To his friends he is “Nick”. In school he had thought about his name and “wishe[d] that he could disguise it, shorten it somehow, the way the other Indian boy, Jaydev, had gotten people to call him Jay.” (*the namesake*, 76) He finally has a name that he believes corresponds to his American identity, does not stand out, is easy to pronounce and does not raise any questions by the people around him.

Even though he feels satisfied with his name change and can finally feel free, Gogol soon realizes that changing a name and becoming someone new is not as easy as “he does not feel like Nikhil” (*the namesake*, 105). He realizes that for every new person he meets he becomes known as Nikhil, but for all the people he has known during his life, for his family especially, he will remain Gogol. He starts to be afraid of his secret being revealed, of someone finding out his former name. He believes that it would be somehow serious if someone found out his former name. If it was not strange enough that different people called him by a different name, it was very perplexing for Gogol when his family started referring to him as Nikhil in front of his friends and roommates. It becomes evident that Nikhil has become his American identity that represents his new life away from his parents, as a normal young American man. When he visits his family at home he assumes his other identity as Gogol, the Indian son: “Somewhere along the two-and-a- half-hour journey, Nikhil

evaporates and Gogol claims him again.” (*the namesake*, 106) This is again a clear example of frame switching. Gogol has formed himself a bicultural identity, as he feels that the two sides in him, the American Nikhil and the Indian Gogol cannot coexist within one hybrid identity.

3.2.3 Gogol’s Adulthood

After Gogol graduates from college he begins work as an architect in a small firm and begins dating a woman called Maxine. With Maxine Gogol is introduced to an entirely different way of life than that of his parents. Gogol enjoys every bit of this American life that he has been led into by Maxine’s family: the ease of conversation, the careless attitude to life, public display of affection and the Western meals with wine and cheese. What Gogol enjoys the most is that he is not reminded of his heritage and background at all. Nothing reminds him of his “Indianness” and that is something that he utterly enjoys. When briefly visiting his parents with Maxine, he finds himself irritated by the habits of his parents and is relieved “to be back in her world” (*the namesake*, 150) when they leave Gogol’s parents house and head for Maxine’s parent’s summer house in New Hampshire. During his stay in New Hampshire he realizes that his family has no way of reaching him and that “he is free.” (*the namesake*, 158)

After his father’s sudden death it is Gogol who has to take care of things and help his mother and sister as much as he can. It is only through the death of his father, that he begins understanding the rituals that his parents had made him attend during his life. For him the “mourner’s diet, forgoing meat and fish” (*the namesake*, 180) seemed peculiar as a child. He did not see the meaning of it and was just one thing more that made his parents cultural heritage seem absurd.

He remembers, back then, being bored by it, annoyed at having to observe a ritual no one else he knew followed. He remembers those meals eaten in complete silence, the television turned off. Now, sitting together at the kitchen table at six-thirty every evening... his father's chair empty, this meatless meal is the only thing that seems to make sense. (*the namesake*, 180)

Suddenly many matters which seemed arbitrary and meaningless to him before have a new sense of meaning. In his childhood many of the rituals and traditions that were imposed upon the children were not explained properly and the only thing that Gogol and his sister thought about was the fact that none of their friends took part in similar kinds of events. The traditions that Gogol's parents tried to teach their children simply lacked meaning and thus seemed extraneous. Now, that Gogol father has died, Gogol suddenly realizes the importance of family and many of the ways of the family. He starts spending time with his mother and sister back at home and less time with his girlfriend Maxine and her family. He starts appreciating things that he used to hate and this can be seen as a turning point in his life. This is when Gogol is forced to grow up when he feels family responsibility and wants to help his mother and sister. Maxine and Gogol end up separating as Maxine does not seem to understand Gogol's sudden interest to be close to his family.

Gogol soon falls in love with a Bengali girl Moushumi. Gogol and Moushumi have a very similar background, their parents are good friends and they have known each other's families since they were children. Even though their mothers are well acquainted, they themselves do not actually know each other. They remember one another from family parties when they were children but they were never friends growing up. After their first few dates they quickly fall in love. Moushumi is very different from Maxine. Even though Moushumi is very American and not at all a traditional Indian woman like both of their mothers, in Moushumi Gogol sees something familiar which attracts him at once. Moushumi feels familiar and safe to Gogol and that is what makes Moushumi interesting to Gogol. After

getting married and living together, they soon find a rhythm in their life which makes them happy. They do not need to explain the habits of their parents to each other, they can use Bengali together whenever they want to and cook Indian food at any time. They have been able to create a life for themselves which they are happy with. They are both Americans living in America but they can be open about their past and they can feel that they are understood.

The difference between Gogol and Moushumi is mainly the fact that Moushumi's life has taken her to different countries. When she was a child her family lived in England from where they moved to America. She has also lived in France after graduating from Brown and only moved back to America because of her boyfriend at the time. Moushumi can thus be analyzed more in terms of an immigrant than Gogol. Through Moushumi, Gogol begins to realize how difficult his parent's life must have been and the struggles they must have faced when moving to a completely different country and culture. Gogol's realizations are made clear when Moushumi and Gogol take a trip to Paris:

Here Moushumi had reinvented herself, without misgivings, without guilt. He admires her, even resents her a little. He realizes that this is what their parents had done in America. What he, in all likelihood, will never do (*the namesake*, 233)

Gogol begins to respect the efforts made by his parents when moving to a completely foreign place as well as admire their courage. He admits it is very probable that he himself will never do the same thing. Soon after their first anniversary Moushumi admits to having betrayed her husband and is in love with Dimitri, an academic globetrotter and a former crush.

The story ends in the place that it all started for Gogol, on Pemberton Road, the place of his parents' house in New Jersey, the place where he spent all his childhood and the place where his parents learned a new life. Gogol, Sonia and Ashima all spend their last Christmas together in that house, as Ashima has decided to sell the house and begin to live half of the

year in India and the other half in America. For Gogol this Christmas and spending time in his old house and room are significant. He thinks back on his life and all that has happened in that house and finds a copy of “the Overcoat” in his old room. At the time he got it as a birthday gift from his father he had not so much as opened it. At this point he knows about his father’s tragic train ride and the book that changed his father’s life. He knows that this author and this story are significant factors in how he got his name. He is thirsty for knowledge and begins reading it. The story goes back to Gogol wondering about his name, its meaning and significance. Also the reader is shown how Gogol openly regrets about having changed his name and the name of Gogol forever disappearing as the number of people who still call him Gogol diminish.

In the following section I will discuss both of the novels and their characters in terms of their identities and give an understanding of how their life events have influenced their identity construction.

4. Discussion

The struggles of Gogol’s parents, Ashima and Ashoke, are very similar to that of Jasmine in Mukherjee’s novel of the same name. The first generation immigrant is faced with having to change their identity in the altering surroundings, transforming themselves away from the culture of their mothers and toward the culture of the new country. The way in which these characters accomplish their transformations vary. Jasmine, arriving in the new country alone, is very dependent on other people around her to help her in her transformation. She knows that without accepting help she is not able to survive. The negative aspect of this is that she is willing to let others go as far as naming her, and in this way she can never be satisfied with

who she has become as it has not been a transformation she fully accepts herself. Many American people around her give her a pet name and begin calling her something other than the name she has introduced herself as. Jasmine does not seem to understand the lightheartedness of the names given to her. In my opinion, a well-fitting quote to Jasmine's situation can be found in the namesake, when Dimitri has created a pet name for Moushumi: "She was aware that in renaming her he had claimed her somehow, already made her his own." (*the namesake*, 258) This idea can be also applied to Jasmine. She takes comfort in the fact that she becomes someone's own when she lets people name her and give her a new identity. She also takes the names given to her very seriously and actively changes herself in order to fit the given name. She has a clear image of each of her identities and actively performs accordingly. She is not content with one name and identity for long therefore she needs to constantly reform. The only name she feels comfortable with is Jasmine, as that is the name her husband in India gave her. It was for him that she came to America and has endured all her struggles. It is for him that she tries to become the international woman that her husband had wanted. In my opinion, it is also the reason why she leaves Bud in the end. She cannot become a traditional wife taking care of her husband so she moves on.

Once Jasmine begins to get settled she deliberately avoids anything and everything Indian that reminds her of the past. She does not keep contact in any way to India, nor does she want to talk about her background. Jasmine also openly discusses her feelings and compares her situation to others around her: "For them, experience leads to knowledge, or else it is wasted. For me, experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill." (*Jasmine*, 33) In this quote Jasmine refers to her past of violence and death. This is the past that she needs to forget in order to fit into the "normal" American surroundings. She needs to and wants to become "plain Jane." (*Jasmine*, 26) She seems to enjoy the fact that people do not ask her

about her past and that her American accent does not reveal her foreignness. As was mentioned earlier, Jasmine's active attempt in performing her identity shows how she is "frame switching" and in this way she is actively and consciously avoiding things that remind her of her other culture. Jasmine performs her identities very consciously and is very aware of who she needs to be or how she needs to act in a situation. By the end of the novel Jasmine realizes the possibilities in the fluidity of her identity. She realizes that she herself has to be in charge of who she is and who she is becoming, in order to be happy. Her realization leads to her abandoning the promise of "normal" American family life. Jasmine becomes more independent and embraces the fact that all her identities live within her and nothing of her future has been yet decided.

Jasmine's identity can be analyzed as a multicultural one, but along her journey she does not celebrate her different identities. We can also see how Jasmine's identity can be seen as a hybrid identity as the fluidness and instability of the immigrant hybrid identity is what keeps Jasmine reinventing herself and moving from one place to another. The feeling of "unhomeliness" (Tyson, 2006. Bhabha, 1994) that is typical for an immigrant and her hybrid identity is also an aspect that can be seen attributing to Jasmine's ongoing journey. The feeling of being caught in the middle of two cultures, of "not belonging to either one", as McLeod (2000, 214) stated earlier is exactly the feelings that Jasmine struggles with. She does not have a place which she can truly call a home but Jasmine finds this thrilling.

Another interesting aspect about Jasmine's character is the connection of her character to the Hindu God Shiva. Jasmine openly declares herself as "a fighter and an adapter" (*Jasmine*, 40) and she is clearly a creator as well as a destroyer. These can be seen as corresponding to the characteristics of the Hindu God Shiva. Shiva is "a complex personality has multiple forms and a paradoxical character. He is a deity who often inhabits the extremes

of human behaviour.” Shiva “is also seen as the destroyer” as well as having “regenerative abilities.” (Elgood 2000, 44–45) These same characteristics can be seen in Jasmine. Jasmine destroys her former identities and constantly creates a new identity for herself. She explains her actions by being obligated to murder herself in order to become something new. She feels that personal history must be forgotten and destroyed, so that life can move forward. Jasmine can be viewed as a violent and strong character at times, facing death and violence multiple times in the novel, but at other times a soft and a compassionate caregiver, a partner and a mother. In this way similar aspects of paradox can be seen in Jasmine as in Shiva. Elgood reports Shiva being “described and portrayed as beautiful, with a third eye in the centre of his forehead” (2000, 45) Similarly Jasmine has a scar on her forehead which she as a child insisted on being her “third eye” (*Jasmine*, 5) instead of a scar. There are many other references and connections between Jasmine and the idea of her as a goddess. Throughout the novel Mukherjee has created a parallel between Jasmine and Hinduism. Jasmine refers to herself as a goddess throughout the novel: “I feel so potent. A goddess.” (*Jasmine*, 12) This is especially seen when Jasmine has killed her rapist. Gamal (2013) notes:

Jasmine identifies herself with Kali, the consort of Lord Shiva and the goddess of violent power whose incarnation is a figure of annihilation. However, she is positively compared to Kali, the slayer of demons, when she slaughters Half-Face, the man who rapes her...

These examples show how Mukherjee has created a strong connection between Jasmine’s character and references to Hindu deities. Jasmine can be viewed as Shiva with her “third eye” and being a destroyer and a creator, but at the same time the violent aspects in Jasmine can be explained by her being “Kali, the consort of Lord Shiva, the goddess of violent power” (Gamal, 2013). This idea of being a destroyer and a creator can be linked to hybrid identity, as the hybrid identity needs to constantly reform and be in creation.

Stephen Greenblatt has analyzed Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* in the following way:

The violence arises not only from the desire to mark boundaries but from the feeling that what one leaves behind, turns away from, *must* no longer exist; that objects endure only for the moment of the act of attention and then are effaced; that the next moment cannot be fully grasped until the last is destroyed. (1980, 199)

This corresponds well with Jasmine's character. It seems as if Jasmine has similar feelings of living in the moment as Doctor Faustus. She needs to be one person at a time and cannot grasp the idea of her former selves living within her. She can indulge so fully into her new identity by only living in that moment and thinking that the past no longer exists. As was mentioned earlier, she does not believe experience to be enriching. Jasmine feels that the experiences that remind her of her former selves and her past life are a burden and this is why she feels so strongly that she needs to kill her former selves in order to be something new.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *the namesake* similar themes of displacement and "unhomeliness" can be seen. Especially with Gogol's parents, Ashima and Ashoke, the idea of not having a place called home is clear. Also first generation immigrants like Jasmine, Ashoke and Ashima find it difficult to start calling America home. For them the idea of home is somewhere else, and each time they return to India Gogol and Sonia see how their parents transform into "less complicated versions of themselves." (*the namesake*, 81) Ashoke and Ashima do not have to perform their identity in India, the way they need to in America. But as years go by and their visits to India become more infrequent, they are able to create a life for their family in which they are comfortable with. They are able to join together parts of their own culture and habits to their new life in America, and are able to create their identities so that their life in America seems fairly simple. As opposed to Jasmine, Ashima and Ashoke find it important to surround themselves with things that remind them of their past and their

motherland. For Ashima and Ashoke it seems to be very important to remain Bengali even in the new country. After Ashoke's death, Ashima is left alone in their house on Pemberton Road. This is a place of big transformation for her, as she needs to become more independent and take charge of her own life. Towards the end of the novel Ashima decides to sell their home on Pemberton road and live six months in America and six months in India. She has decided to spend her years in the two most important places in her life. "She will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere." (*the namesake*, 276) Now that Gogol and Sonia have grown up, her husband has died, and it is no longer mandatory for her to stay in America full time, she fulfills her own dream of returning to Calcutta. The person returning to Calcutta, however, is not the same person who once lived there. She is now an independent woman with an American passport who wants to return to her other homeland in six months' time. Her identity can be seen as a bicultural one as she can truly enjoy her life in both countries and she can perform her identity differently in a given country.

As was already stated before, the life of the first generation immigrants and the second generation immigrants differ greatly, even though they can both struggle with similar issues concerning their identity. For Gogol, many of his struggles begin with his difficulties identifying with his name. He does not know why he has a name that is "neither Indian nor America, but of all things Russian." (*the namesake*, 76) He begins to despise his name and everything else his parents have given him. He is not willing to learn the Bengali ways of life and does not respect his parents' rituals and parties. He grows up wanting to be just like every other American child in his class, considering that he was born in America. He feels that his identity and his name do not correspond. He feels American but has a foreign name. After changing his name to Nikhil and having his friends call him "Nick" he begins living a very

American life, rejecting his parents and wanting to surround himself with nothing that reminds him of his Indianness. At a young age he believes this to be his route to happiness, although Gogol is seen to be extremely confused with his identity. As a young person he needs to feel accepted in his surroundings and fears that the foreignness of his parents and their teachings will somehow be in the way of that. Only after learning the story behind his name, the importance of the name to his father, and later of his father's death, does Gogol realize the importance of his background. He realizes that the fact that his family is Bengali cannot be removed from him and that for him to be truly content with himself he needs to be able to create an identity for himself that lets him be an American with Bengali roots. Gogol's struggles show the difficult position of second generation immigrants, as the country of birth for their parents is not the country of birth for them. It seems that only after he finds meaning in his name and meaning behind many of the Bengali ways, does he begin to accept his own background. For Gogol the feelings of "in-between" and the "psychological limbo" caused by the two cultures is very different from that of his parents because he does not have any emotional connections to the place his parents call home. Kung has demonstrated the role of the second generation immigrant well in his paper. He states:

[I]t is the second generation who are actively choosing and discarding pieces of their parent's cultural legacy. This generation will decide, consciously and unconsciously, which pieces of their cultural inheritance to incorporate into their lives as Americans, which parts to alter, and which practices to adopt.
(2009)

This exemplifies what Gogol is faced with throughout his life. As a teenager his need to be unlike his parents is strong, therefore he rejects much of his parents' culture as well as the name they have given him. As he matures he finds meaning in his past and returns to his cultural background. This is the main difference in Lahiri's novel between the first generation

and the second generation immigrant. The second generation immigrant has much more freedom in establishing his identity, but simultaneously it brings much confusion to life as in the end the child wants to be loyal to his parents. This feeling of duty that can be seen in Gogol towards the end of the story is what creates his feelings of regret towards changing his name and denying much of his family's cultural background. It seems that Gogol's father needs to die before Gogol can understand and form his own identity. Gogol needs to step into his father's shoes, taking care of his mother and helping her around the house, in order for him to come to terms with himself. The shame towards his name and background can be seen to be replaced by regret. Years of uncertainty, insecurity, undecidedness and shame are slowly replaced by understanding, duty, regret and confidence about who he is, who he has been and who he needs to become towards the end of the novel.

Jasmine and Gogol both struggle with forming their identities. They both struggle with their names and fundamentally the question of who they are. They both have strong ideas of what they do not want to be or become, but they are unaware of how to implement their ideal identity. Much of their ideas of who they want to become seem to be influenced by how they think and want others to perceive them. Judith Caesar has suggested an interesting idea concerning how Gogol searches for his identity. Caesar proposes that "[t]his pattern of looking for identities in relationships seems to be dangerous for... Gogol" and this in my view can also be applied to Jasmine as all of her identities are created by others in her relationships. Caesar continues that "Gogol's unhappiness may not come from the problems of being bi-cultural, precisely, but from his own limited self-understanding and his rational impulse to see alternative selves as binary and mutually exclusive." (2007) Hence Gogol's struggles have been caused by his inability to understand the hybridity of identity and his belief that he can only have one concrete identity at a time. Lahiri does not reveal how

Gogol's life and identity will transform and transpire, but the fact that Gogol is left reading "The Overcoat" in the ending passages of the novel suggests, that Gogol might finally understand the importance of the fluidity of hybrid identity from the pages of Nikolai Gogol's short story. The reader is left hoping that Gogol will finally understand what his own father had tried to teach him about identity and the need to actively change it.

5. Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* and Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *the namesake* both portray a story of immigrant experience. The reader is introduced to characters struggling with their identities and determining who they are. In Mukherjee's novel we are shown the life of a first generation immigrant and the difficulties Jasmine faces when settling to America. Jasmine is portrayed as a fighter and an adaptor who fiercely changes her identity in a changing situation. In my study I found that Jasmine is exceedingly influenced by other people's notions of her and is willing to let others determine who she is. Ultimately she rejects the identities given to her and realizes the fluidity of her hybrid identity. Jasmine's journey is a never-ending one and her identity is forever changing. Mukherjee has presented a character that shows the struggles of immigrant identity formation as well as a universal theme of "unhomeliness" and displacement that can be created from a person having a vivid background. In *Jasmine* we can see that her identity is not only a bicultural one, but clearly a hybrid identity that shows fluidity and transformation. Jasmine is seen to be "frame switching" when she actively performs her identity and rejects her past. Jasmine is also seen clearly performing her different identities and actively presenting herself as someone she thinks that she needs to be. Mukherjee has also created a connection between Jasmine's

character and personality and the Hindu deities of Shiva and Kali. This imagery and connection adds to the idea of Jasmine as a strong, independent and a transformative character whose life story is in no way finished at the end of the novel. The reader is shown the struggles of the first generation immigrant in establishing who she is in the new country, but through Jasmine we are also shown important aspects of the immigrant hybrid identity. Mukherjee has been able to show the importance of being able to create a fluid hybrid identity and the importance of realizing that hybrid identity is not fixed, stable or finished.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *the namesake* Lahiri represents an immigrant family who struggles with their identities each in their own way. Through Gogol the reader is introduced to the difficult position of a second generation immigrant. Gogol shows similar struggles as Jasmine with identity formation, but much of Gogol's struggles instigate from the insecurities caused by his name. Gogol's parents are unsuccessful at explaining the choice of name for Gogol and as a teenager Gogol has difficulties in identifying with it. Gogol's story can be seen as a story of finding roots, determining who you are and coming to terms with yourself. Gogol begins to understand the value of his name and his background only as an adult after the death of his father. Gogol begins to realize what hybridity of identity is, and that it is not necessary for him to try and create one solid identity. Lahiri has created a story that introduces the variety of issues that an immigrant family faces. As Mukherjee's novel, Lahiri's novel discusses the themes on "unhomeliness" and displacement. With the immigrant family, Lahiri has been able to portray bicultural identity performance and hybrid identity in different ways.

In my thesis I have introduced identity in terms of developmental psychology and social psychology as well as explained what is meant by cultural identity, especially bicultural identity, hybrid identity and identity performance. I have shown through detailed plot analysis how the identities of the main characters, Jasmine and Gogol, are created and what the

struggles are that they face as immigrants in their identity formation process. In conclusion it is important to note that the significance of creating a fluid hybrid identity is not only an issue that a postcolonial immigrant is faced with, but an issue of increasing importance in the multicultural environment of today's world where the crossing of borders is easier than ever.

Further investigation would be necessary on the issue of names and identity as that is something that was difficult to find earlier research on. It would be interesting to study the psychological impacts of name change as well as the ability of people or literary characters to be able to create and transform their identity with the changing name

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